



March 1, 2016

The Honorable Rick Scott  
Governor of Florida  
PL05, The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

The Honorable Andy Gardiner  
President, The Florida Senate  
409, The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001

The Honorable Steve Crisafulli  
Speaker, Florida House of Representatives  
420, The Capitol  
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0001



Dear Governor Scott, President Gardiner and Speaker Crisafulli:

On behalf of the South Florida Water Management District (SFWMD) and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), we are pleased to provide you with the **2016 South Florida Environmental Report**, a major reporting consolidation in accordance with Chapter 2005-36, Laws of Florida, and Subsection 373.036(7), Florida Statutes. Overall, this three-volume report, including scientific peer review of Volume I, unifies more than 75 individual documents, meets multiple legal requirements and efficiently shares important information about restoring the South Florida ecosystem.

As South Florida continues to experience higher-than-normal rainfall, resulting in flooding in the Everglades Water Conservation Areas and continued discharges from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee estuaries by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the importance of the restoration of this region is more apparent than ever. Governor Scott recently declared a state of emergency in Lee, Martin and St. Lucie counties to address the impacts of high water conditions throughout the system. FDEP and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission have also issued emergency orders, and SFWMD is implementing multiple actions to move water and provide relief. The environmental impacts from the wettest January in South Florida since record-keeping began in 1932 will be captured in next year's report.

We are proud to update you with our progress over the 2015 Water Year (May 1, 2014–April 30, 2015) and to assure you of our continued commitment to this national treasure. Florida's investments in environmental improvement continue to achieve results. With support from Governor Rick Scott and the Florida Legislature, more than \$362 million was put to work in fiscal

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year 2014-2015 to build projects and implement programs to restore America's Everglades—from the Kissimmee headwaters to Florida Bay—including \$71.4 million to implement Governor Scott's Restoration Strategies Plan for achieving the water quality (phosphorus) limits for the Everglades.

For this reporting period, phosphorus levels in 90 percent of the southern Everglades region are below the limit of 10 parts per billion. Over their 21-year operational period, the stormwater treatment areas (STAs) treated more than 16 million acre-feet of water and removed more than 2,000 metric tons of phosphorus. Since 1996, farming best management practices in the Everglades Agricultural Area reduced phosphorus levels by an annual average of 56 percent, more than double the improvement required by state law. And, FDEP is implementing Basin Management Action Plans with associated projects to accomplish additional water quality improvements across the northern Everglades.

Managing above-average rainfall in the Lake Okeechobee region marked another highlight of Water Year 2015. While overall rainfall was slightly below average, its distribution was uneven and created water management challenges. The Lake Okeechobee watershed was very wet, resulting in far above-average inflows and outflows. In October 2014, the lake rose more than 3.5 feet, to 16 feet NGVD, triggering freshwater regulatory releases to the Caloosahatchee and St. Lucie estuaries. With conditions drier than normal south of the lake, the Everglades STAs had treatment capacity available, and unprecedented operations sent lake releases into the STAs for treatment prior to discharge to the southern Everglades.

With Everglades water cleaner than it has been in generations, our agencies remain committed to further improving environmental water quality, increasing water storage and reestablishing more historic water flows to benefit the South Florida ecosystem. We are working together to complete projects that will provide long-term environmental benefits and restore and sustain Florida's treasured water resources.

The complete 2,000-page *2016 South Florida Environmental Report*, an eight-page highlights and all previous consolidated reports are available on the South Florida Water Management District's website at [www.sfwmd.gov/sfer](http://www.sfwmd.gov/sfer).

Thank you for your invaluable commitment to Florida's environment.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Jonathan P. Steverson, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a series of loops and a horizontal line.

Jonathan P. Steverson, Secretary  
*Florida Department of Environmental Protection*

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Daniel O'Keefe, featuring a large, stylized 'D' followed by the name 'Dan O'Keefe' in a cursive script.

Daniel O'Keefe, Chair, Governing Board  
*South Florida Water Management District*

c:     The Honorable Carlos Lopez-Cantera, Lieutenant Governor  
       Members, Florida Senate and Florida House of Representatives  
       Members, SFWMD Governing Board  
       Drew Bartlett, FDEP, Deputy Secretary, Water Policy  
       Edward C. Smith, FDEP, Director, Office of Ecosystem Projects  
       Ernie Marks, SFWMD, Director, Everglades Policy and Coordination

Attachment:   *2016 South Florida Environmental Report Highlights*